



A look at the intergenerational associations between self-compassion, body esteem, and emotional eating within dyads of mothers and their adult daughters

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ABSTRACT

Research has demonstrated that mothers transmit body-related attitudes and eating behaviors to their daughters, but little is known about the role of self-compassion—treating oneself with kindness and being mindful about one's experiences—in this transmission. This research examined the intrapersonal and interpersonal associations between mothers' and daughters' self-compassion, body esteem (i.e., positive self-evaluations about one's appearance), and emotional eating (i.e., the tendency to eat in response to negative affect). Dyads ($N = 191$) of Canadian mothers (mean age: 57.37) and daughters (mean age: 28.76) completed self-report questionnaires. Dyadic, structural equation modeling and bootstrapping analyses were conducted to examine relationships among the study variables. Controlling for mothers' and daughters' body mass index, self-compassionate mothers and daughters reported higher body esteem. Additionally, daughters of self-compassionate mothers were more self-compassionate and had higher body esteem, which in turn predicted lower emotional eating. Adding to the literature on the intergenerational transmission of eating-related attitudes and behaviors, results suggest a relation between mother and daughter self-compassion, body esteem, and eating behaviors. Results also showed that attitudes toward oneself were related to eating behaviors. Mothers' self-compassion might provide a model for daughters, which in turn is associated with daughters' improved body esteem and eating behaviors.

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1. Introduction

Body dissatisfaction and concern about eating behavior is well established as a “normative discontent” among all age groups of women (Carrard, Kruseman, & Marques-Vidal, 2018; Rodin, Silberstein, & Striegel-Moore, 1984). Such preoccupations take so much space in some women's lives that they hinder physical and psychological well-being (Becker, Verzijl, Kilpela, Wilfred, & Stewart, 2019). Multiple factors are involved in how women develop a certain type of relationship with their body as well as with food, with many studies consistently showing that mothers are particularly influential in shaping their daughters' attitudes and eating behaviors (Arroyo, Segrin, & Andersen, 2017; Cooley, Toray, Wang,

& Valdez, 2008; Handford, Rapee, & Fardouly, 2018; Pike & Rodin, 1991). A great deal of past research has examined dyads of mothers and their child or adolescent daughters (e.g., Bauer, Bucchianeri, & Neumark-Sztainer, 2013; Zarychta et al., 2019). However, despite research suggesting that the mother-daughter relationship continues to play a crucial, life-long role in development throughout adulthood (Bojczyk, Lehan, McWey, Melson, & Kaufman, 2011), less is known about whether mothers and daughters still share similar attitudes toward the self in general, their body, and food once daughters reach adulthood. In the present research on dyads of mothers and their adult daughters, we examine intrapersonal and intergenerational associations between attitudes toward body and self and eating behaviors. As research supports that self-compassion may be a protective factor against poor body image and disordered eating (Braun, Park, & Gorin, 2016), one of our purposes is to examine whether daughters of mothers who have an accepting attitude toward themselves and their body are less prone to emotional eating. Specifically, we investigate how mothers' and

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